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Fig. 180. Husband and wife, with baby. Choroti. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. Photo. E. v. R.

[888 754 683] 622 supernatural, of some kind or other, plays a leading part when children kill their aged parents.

Every village is ruled by a chief or headman. According to the observations of some investigators, these headmen do not nowadays possess any great power or authority, but among the Choroti whom I visited in 1901, the chief's authority was by no means inconsiderable. For example, it only needed my arranging with him that the Indians were to carry out a certain piece of work, and the work would be done. For the work performed by the Indians I paid the chief in goods, which he allotted among them as he himself thought fit, as it appeared. In war, each village [643] contingent is under the leadership of their headman. It was stated by the soldiers of Fort Crevaux that all Choroti used to be under a paramount chief, whose authority over all the other chiefs principally consisted in his being entitled to taking chief command in war. The office of village headman as a rule descends from father to son.

622 554 That certain Choroti chiefs used to be held in greater respect than others was made evident to us at a visit we made to a sugar plantation on our return journey to Salta. A large number of Choroti had just then

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arrived at this plantation to look for work. Led by their chiefs, they had made the long journey from the region of their homes. The chiefs, some of whom had met us in the Chaco, whilst others had only heard of us, wished to pay us a call. Personally I do not possess any notes about this reception, but I have come across some in Fries' diary. He thus refers to the incident: »When the Choroti Indians, whom we knew from Tatarenda and who were now working here, saw us, they came, almost to a man, and greeted us, being evidently very glad to meet us again. *The principal chief, at the head of all the lesser caziques*, was among those who came and paid us their respects.»[1]

A favoured position in the village community is that held by the medicine men; for their services they are rewarded by a — from a Choroti point of view — generous remuneration in the form of food and drink. That among the Choroti the medicine men are held in great esteem, and that everybody is anxious to be on good terms with them, appears only natural to anyone with a knowledge of what an important part magical conceptions play with these Indians. It is largely by the Finlander explorer, Rafael Karsten — oft-quoted in the present work — that ethnological science has been enriched by information and detailed reports on the magical customs and practices of the Choroti, as well as of other Chaco tribes.[2]

The Choroti Indians believe that man, all his life through, is more or less subject to influences from spirits, who, on the whole, are of a harmful nature. Especial danger is to be apprehended from spirits on certain occasions such as child-birth, pubescence and death. Usually the evil is worked by a spirit, »mohsek», entering a person through one of the orifices of his body and thereby assuming possession of him. If at birth a child is deformed or very sickly, it is supposed to be possessed by some evil »moshek», and is on that account killed.[3] When a girl has attained the age of puberty, during the first critical, time she must keep a covering over her head, so that no evil spirit may be able to enter her body by way of her nose, mouth, eyes or ears.[4] The occasion of a girl attaining puberty is celebrated with a dance which undoubtedly is of a magical character.

[1] Professor Robert Fries: diary, X, p. 14. Italics by von Rosen.
[2] See Bibliography attached.
[3] Karsten (4), p. 176.
[4] Karsten (4), p. 165.